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ABSTRACT

In 1969 the New York State Legislature decentralized the New York City Public School System into 32 elected school districts with a limited amount of authority over elementary and junior high schools. The legislation provided for community school boards to be elected by district residents. An analysis of election results in 1975 and 1977 showed that neither the race nor the ethnicity of individual candidates was significantly correlated to winning (see ED 152 951). This document reports on a followup study examining the relationships between the candidates' racial and ethnic backgrounds, the ethnic character of their districts, and their rate of electoral success. The authors found that the percent of candidates from an ethnic group is overwhelmingly correlated to the percent of that ethnic group in the school district population. The percentage of school board seats won by whites tends to be greater than the percentage of white candidates, while blacks and Hispanics tend to win proportionately fewer seats. (Author/PGD)

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RACE AND ETHNICITY AS FACTORS IN WINNING SCHOOL BOARD ELECTIONS: PREDICTING ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF COMMUNITY SCHOOL BOARDS

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Predicting Ethnic Composition of Community School Boards

INTRODUCTION

In 1969 the New York State Legislature decentralized the New York City Public School System into 32* elected school districts with a limited amount of authority over Elementary and Junior High Schools. The legislation provided for Community School Boards to be elected by District residents. The purpose of this study is to determine if race or ethnic concentration within a District is significantly related to the ethnic identity of School Boards election winners.

It was clear that under the appropriate legislation both the Board of Education and the Board of Elections have certain election responsibilities, but it was not clear as to who had the ultimate responsibility of initiating action regarding the election. As a result of this lack of leadership, a city-wide committee was formed to provide needed directions and leadership. This group, the Community School Board Elections Committee, is an informal consortium of over twenty civic, labor, parent and educational groups concerned with the process of School Board elections. Included in the committee membership are the writers of this paper.

*Originally 31 Districts were established, but by 1973 two districts were formed out of one existing district.

While this committee has no formal status, it has played an increasingly active role in school board elections. Two examples of the committee's accomplishments are its action as a catalyst for the passage of legislation allowing mail registration for "Parent Voters"; and its persuasion of the New York City Central Board of Education to establish a Fair Campaign Practices Commission (see Special Circular #56, New York City Board of Education, 1977), to enforce a code of ethics for the elections.

The diversity of opinion represented by committee members usually precludes unanimity, however, there is general agreement that the major goal of the committee is to improve the electoral process. It was this concern that led the committee to examine various aspects of this process in order to determine priorities for improvement. A questionnaire was prepared to collect data from all candidates in the 1975 elections, successful and unsuccessful. This questionnaire, which isolated over seventy variables, sought information on the full range of the candidate's experiences, starting with his/her decision to run for office, the petitioning period, the actual campaign, and the final results. The committee was interested in using the data obtained from the questionnaire in order to gain insight into those factors influencing the political and electoral process. A similar questionnaire was sent to all candidates in the 1977 Election in order to provide data for comparison.

The authors were commissioned by the committee to prepare a report on the school board election process comparing the 1975 and 1977 elections in regard to several variables. As part of the study, the authors undertook to determine the extent to which race or ethnicity played a role in winning or losing school board elections in New York City. The results of the comparative study were presented at the 1978 meeting of AERA.

One finding was that neither the race or ethnicity* of an individual candidate was significantly correlated to winning. At the presentation, several questions were raised by members of the audience as to what effect race or ethnicity of the candidate would have if one considered that ethnic group's concentration in his school district. Since the data had not been broken down on a district by district level, the question could not be answered at that time.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Three research questions provide the basis for the study. These questions are:

1. What is the relationship between the percentage of an ethnic group in a school district and the percentage

*Originally, the authors divided "Whites" into several ethnic groups, but due to the small "N" for each grouping, this study only concentrates on Whites, Blacks and Hispanics. The three Oriental candidates are included in the White group.

of candidates for the school board from that ethnic group?

2. What is the relationship between the percentage of an ethnic group in a school district and the percentage of school board seats won by that ethnic group?

3. Are there ethnic group differences in the rate of winning school board seats compared to the rate of fielding candidates?

We know from proponents of affirmative action programs that ethnic groups are not in all cases represented in the same proportion in the decision-making positions as they are represented in the total social system. These questions focus on the school district and school boards as social systems and ask to what degree we can predict the ethnic composition of one (i.e., school board candidates or school board members) from the ethnic composition of the other (i.e., the school district).

In addition, the relative efficiency of the ethnic group in winning school board seats will be examined. Does the social system active within a school district encourage greater proportional participation of some ethnic groups than others? Are members of one ethnic group able to capture proportionally more seats on the board than the proportion of candidates that they field?

The following analyses do not attempt to shed light on the dynamics of any relationships that are identified (for example, whether ethnic group memebers or subgroups consciously recognize the identified relationship and behave in a corresponding fashion to perpetuate it).

DATA ANALYSIS

The units of anaylsis for this study are types of groups. These group types are New York City School Districts, District Candidates for School Board Seats and District School Boards. For each type of group there are 32 units for which counts and percentages of White, Black and Hispanic members were obtained. Information was obtained from three different sources:

1. Community School District Profiles; prepared by the New York City Planning Commission, July 1974 which helped identify the ethnic/racial makeup of each District.

2. Members of the School Board Elections Committee familiar with individual school districts who helped identify each candidate's race or ethnic background.

3. Director, Office of Community School Board Liason Unit of New York City Central Board of Education, who prepared a study which identified the racial/ethnic composition of each Board.

All percentages were converted to normal curve deviates (z) for the subsequent correlational and One Way ANOVA analyses.

Table 1 presents measures of central tendency (i.e., Means and Medians) for ethnic group membership within each of the three groups under study as well as the correlations necessary to answer research questions one and two.

The correlations indicate that the relationship is extremely high between the percent of school district population belonging to a particular ethnic group and both the percent of school board candidates and the percent of seats won on the school board by that ethnic group. As one can see from Table 1, the lowest correlation is .88 between percent of school district population and percent seats won for Hispanics. Still, percent of school district population accounts for over 77% of the variance in percent of seats won by Hispanics. Even stronger correlations appear for Whites and Blacks with a high of .96 for percent of school district population with percent of school board candidates for the White group. About 92% of the variation among districts in percent of white candidates can be accounted for by knowing the percent of the school district population that is White. Evidently, the percent of the school board candidates running from an ethnic group is overwhelmingly determined by the percent of that ethnic group in the school district population. This affirms

what Williams (Williams, 1977) reported on a study of five New York City School Districts in the 1973 elections. However, Levine (Levine, AESA 1976) found other factors also accounting for candidates' success or failure.

From the Mean and Median differences on the Percent of District Population (Table 1) that belong to each ethnic group, one can see that the Black and Hispanic Distributions are skewed in nature. For example, one half of all school districts have less than 8.9% Hispanics, but a few school districts have substantially more than that percentage. Similarly, one half of all school districts have less than 19% Blacks, but a few have substantially more than that percentage.

Although we have seen that there is a very high correspondence between ethnic concentration within a school district and both percent of candidates fielded and percent of school board members, Table 1 suggests that some groups field proportionally more candidates, yet they win proportionally fewer seats. For example, the White group's median for percent of candidates (59.4%) is approximately equal to its Percent of District Population Median (60.8%), while its Percent of School Board Members is higher (77.8%). On the other hand, Blacks have 19% of the School District Population but run 26.8% of the candidates and win only 11.1% of the Board seats.

To investigate this phenomenon more exactly, the researchers created for each ethnic group an "Efficiency of Winning Score" (EWS). This EWS results from subtracting the normal curve deviate (z) for percent of candidates running from the normal curve deviate (z) for percent of board positions won. The ANOVA summary appears in Table 2.

One can see from Table 2 that a significant F ratio reflects the fact that EWS for Whites is positive while the EWS for both Blacks and Hispanics is negative. This means that the percentage of school board seats won by Whites tends to be greater than the percentage of candidates that they represent. On the other hand, Blacks and Hispanics comprise a larger percent of candidates than they do of elected school board members. This difference is "efficiency" is highlighted by the fact that Whites do not run at all in school districts where they are less than 18% of the population. Remember that we have seen the general correspondence between the percent of an ethnic group winning a school board election and their representation in the school district.

To ascertain why minority candidates ran for the School Board when their percentage of the District's population was less than 20%, one of the authors interviewed 37 of the 53 Black and Hispanic candidates who meet this criterion. Seventeen responded that they ran to protest a condition or to make

a specific point; eight said they felt they had a chance to win; four answered that they ran for political recognition; and six either were not sure why they ran or were reluctant to respond.

In predicting ethnic compositions of Community School Boards, the authors found an extremely high correlation between the ethnic composition of the District's population and representation on the school board. It was also ascertained that White candidates are more "efficient" in terms of winning seats on Community School Boards than either Black or Hispanic candidates. In accounting for the dynamics of election success or failure in the New York City elections, a number of variables are operable. Factors such as Socio-Economic Status, voter behavior, method of counting the votes, support by various groups, etc. all play an important role. However, none of them was examined in this study.

TABLE 1

Means, Medians and Correlation Coefficients

By Ethnic Group for Percent of School District Population, Percent of Candidates and Percent of School Board Seats Won.

	Ethnic Group					
	White		Black		Hispanic	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
Percent of District Population	59.8	60.8	25.9	19.0	12.9	8.9
Percent of Candidates	52.4	59.4	31.8	26.8	15.9	9.1
Percent of Board Members	62.9	77.8	25.0	11.1	12.1	0.0
Correlation of:						
Percent of District Population vs Percent of Candidates	.96		.94		.92	
Percent of District Population vs Percent of Seats Won	.95		.94		.88	

TABLE 2

ANOVA for Efficiency of Winning Scores*
By Ethnic Group

	White	Black	Hispanic
Mean	.499	-.637	-.805
S.D.	1.286	1.226	1.027

$F = 11.09$ $df = 2,93$

$p \leq .001$

*A positive mean score indicates that there is a tendency for that group to win a greater percentage of School Board Seats than the percentage of candidates that run from that group.

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